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The fantastic tale is a genre of children's literature in which magic and reality are found side by side in a superficially plausible story with a definite historical setting. Motifs characteristic of the tale are living toys, strange children, modern witches, space and time displacements, "doors" to the wonderland, the mythical world itself, and combat between good and evil. Writers of this genre may be attempting to satisfy the child's need for pleasure, to free his imagination, or "to impart knowledge and character." Certain hypotheses hold that the fantastic tale is particularly relevant to 8- to 10-year-olds who must be freeing themselves gradually from their beliefs in magic. Further research, however, is needed on two problems--whether the mental structure of a child is by definition more receptive to magic than that of an adult, and whether children can extract philosophical truths from such tales. (JS)

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Göte Klingberg:

THE FANTASTIC TALE FOR CHILDREN — ITS LITERARY AND EDUCTIONAL PROBLEMS

The study of a genre of children's literature is a good example of the necessity in children's literature research to co-ordinate different aspects and methods. The fantastic tale will here be seen from the view-points of the history of literature, literary analysis, the history of education, child psychology and even sociology.

The definition of the fantastic tale

The fantastic tale was first recognized as a genre of children's literature rather recently, viz. by Krüger and Koch.[1] Its distinctive feature is said to be that wonders (magic) and reality are found side by side.

According to Koch fantastic tales for children have been published "for some decades". Krüger goes back to *Gulliver's Travels*. Neither Krüger nor Koch, however, refers to E. T. A. Hoffmann. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the definition of the fantastic tale, given by them, is the definition used by the literary historians in order to distinguish the "Kunstmärchen" of Hoffmann from the other tales of the German romantics.[2] It should also be noted that the term fantastic tale is tied to the "Märchen" of Hoffmann; "contes fantastiques" being the title used in the French translations. From among the tales of Hoffmann two are written especially for children and so it seems reasonable to accept the definition of Hoffmann's tales as the definition of the fantastic tale and to regard his two tales for children as the first of our genre. In *Nußknacker und Mausekönig* (1816) we meet an ordinary middle-class family at their Christmas celebrations and a friend of the family who seems quite commonplace. But he turns out to have a mysterious background and the nut-cracker is his nephew laid under a magic spell. Another ordinary family is described in *Das fremde Kind* (1817). The private tutor of the children is, however, transformed under the very eyes of the father and the mother, into a fly, and the father tries to kill him with a fly-swat. This is common reality and a magic world side by side and in complete union.

It is commonly agreed that more strict definitions of the genres of children's literature are material for the description of this literature.[3] One must, however, bear in mind that genres are abstractions. The authors write as it suits them; they may create masterpieces which are hard to force into genre classifications. All the same we have to make these abstractions, and they may also be of interest to the literary critic: too many different motifs in the same story may impair the literary value.

The fantastic tale is thus to be kept apart from some other genres of children's literature. A distinction between the fantastic tale and the fairy-tale (Märchen)

is given by Krüger and Koch: in the fairy-tale all belongs to the wonderland. As it seems possible now and then to speak of a reality in fairy-tales, too, one may add that the reality of the fantastic tale is "here and now" (often the world of some ordinary children in the author's own times), whereas the fairy-tale occurs at a nondescript place and time. A distinction must also be made between fantastic tales and nonsense literature, a distinction that is very confused in the papers of Krüger and Koch. For instance, both place Kästner's *Der 35. Mai* among the fantastic tales. In this book, it is true, one of the motifs of the fantastic tale is met, viz. the "door" to the desired world (it is a wardrobe as in *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, see below). But on the whole the book is a nonsense book. The distinction between fantastic tale and nonsense literature here proposed is that the fantastic tale is wholly logical, while in nonsense literature there is no, at least no ordinary, logic at all. Without much hesitation I would moreover place some other books mentioned by Krüger and Koch in the nonsense literature tradition (Lofting's *The story of Doctor Dolittle*, Traver's *Mary Poppins*, Linklater's *The wind on the moon*). It has to be acknowledged that nonsense traits are often found in what must be regarded as true fantastic tales. The spread of nonsense traits to other literary categories is, however, very characteristic of much modern children's literature and must not prevent the demarcation of a boundary between nonsense literature and the fantastic tale.

One of the motifs of the fantastic tale is the mythical world (see below). A good example is the world of *Narnia* in the books of C. S. Lewis. These books must be called fantastic tales. The heroes are ordinary school children who enter the mythical world through the "door". In other books, however, we only meet the mythical world and nothing of ordinary reality as in de la Mare's *The three Mulla-Mulgars*, Tolkien's *The hobbit*, and Jansson's books of the valley of the *Mumins*. Although such worlds occur as a motive in the fantastic tale, the definition of this tale places the last mentioned books in a separate genre.

Krüger speaks of Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgersson* as a fantastic tale. Lagerlöf is said to be the first to make a hero have fantastic adventures through the help of animals. Yet it is a fact that Lagerlöf took her idea from Kipling's *Jungle books*. These books, their forerunners and relatives are preferably to be put into a separate genre, even if it is true that some books about animals that behave as human beings may be regarded as fantastic tales (as White's *Charlotte's web* and Selden's *A cricket in Times Square*).

From *The King's Fifth* by Scott O'Dell, illustrated by Samuel Bryant.

The motives of the fantastic tale for children

As seen above, there are some motifs that are characteristic for the fantastic tale. Some of these motifs will now be treated. The monograph on the history of the fantastic tale as an international genre for children remains to be written, as in fact all other such genre monographs.

(a) The living toys

In his work for adults Hoffmann showed interest in automatons, and something of this kind are the living toys in his tales for children. The nut-cracker and the toys in the cabinet *(Nußknacker und Mausekönig)* become alive. In *Das fremde Kind*, the toys given by the uncle attack the children. H. C. Andersen's *Den lille Idas Blomster* (Little Ida's flowers, 1835), based on *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, may have influenced many later authors. In Lorenzini's (Collodi's) *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1880), not only Pinocchio but also the puppets at the puppet-show appear as living. As the nut-cracker in *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, Pinocchio ends as a real boy. In modern literature for younger children the living dolls, cars, planes etc. are commonplace. A more interesting modern work is Clarke's *The Twelve and the Genii* (1962), a book about the discovery of the forgotten wooden soldiers of the Brontë children. Sometimes these soldiers appear as wooden and sometimes as real men. The children who find the soldiers, their family and the whole neighbourhood are very realistic. It is only the Twelve who form the fantastic point. On the other hand, these living toys are seen by the adults as well as by the children.

(b) The strange children

The motif of the strange children is met with in the title of Hoffmann's *Das fremde Kind*. The children of the story play in the forest with the strange child, the son of the fairy queen. A later strange child is Peter Pan in Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911), although nonsense and parody are common. Lindren's *Pippi Långstrump* (Pippi Longstocking, 1945) may be placed in this category, too, chiefly because of Pippi's kinship with Peter Pan. More fantastic is Farmer's *The summer birds* (1962). Here, the child is in fact a bird, masked as a boy. One summer he teaches a school class to fly but with insidious intent.[4]

(c) The modern witches

As distinct from the witches of the fairy-tale, most witches of the fantastic tale appear in the common life to-day. A male witch is the tutor in Hoffmann's *Das fremde Kind*, who is shown to be a demon and is responsible for the death of the father. A very similar motive is found in Masefield's *The midnight folk* (1927), where the boy's antagonists form a witches' coven and the leader is disguised as the boy's governess. Less frightening is the witch in Sleigh's *Carbonel* (1955). Miss Price in Norton's *Bed-knob and broomstick* (1945—47, 1957) is rather nice.

(d) The "door" to the desired world

The "door" is a fourth motif already to be found in Hoffmann, viz. in *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*. Through the big wardrobe, where her father's fur coat is hanging, Marie comes into a foreign country. In Molesworth's *The cuckoo clock* (1877), the doors are the real doors of the house but yet doors to the wonderlands. The children in Nesbit's *The house of Arden* (1908) get an opportunity to follow the fates of their ancestors. The way is a door in the upper story, which they sometimes can see and walk through, although it really is a door in addition to the fifty-seven that are in the house. In the first book about Narnia by C. S. Lewis (*The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*, 1950) the wardrobe is the "door" exactly as in *Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, there are even fur coats.

(e) Space and time displacements

Space and time displacements are a characteristic of Nesbit, even without the "door". In *The story of the amulet* (1906) the children for instance come to ancient Babylon and the Babylonian queen is transferred to the present time. Many writers of to-day work in the Nesbit tradition. Norton's *Bed-knob and broomstick* deals with a bed that can be moved to the Southern Ocean and to other times (even a person from times long past is brought to our times). Time displacements are further found in Hilda Lewis' *The ship that flew* (1939), in C. S. Lewis' *Narnian books* (1950—56) etc.

(f) The mythical worlds

As said above, books which only deal with a mythical world may be viewed as a separate genre. In some of the fantastic tales, however, a mythical world is placed side by side with the ordinary world. Sometimes these tales describe fairly idyllic worlds of miniature people as, for instance, in Lindgren's *Nils Karlsson-Pyssling* (1949) and in the books about the *Borrowers* by Norton (1952—61). A stranger world outside space and time is Lewis' Narnia and Lindgren's The country far away in *Mio, min Mio* (1954).

(g) The combat between good and evil

In the mythical worlds of Lewis and Lindgren a combat is fought between representatives of the good and evil powers. This motive is already found in Hoffmann, especially in *Das fremde Kind*, where the pheasant prince fights the demon Pepser and the father fights this same Pepser in his disguise as a tutor.

The educational aims of the fantastic tales for children

Up till now we have dealt with the fantastic tale only as a literary category. It is, however, also possible to define a genre of children's literature with regard to its educational aims. It may even be appropriate in children's literature research to emphasize these aims. From this viewpoint the fantastic tale may be divided into at least three genres.

In modern literary reviews of children's books one often speaks about books only for pleasure as opposed to books with educational aims, but all books

for children have such aims. If one wishes only to give entertainment, the aim is to satisfy one of the needs of children, the need for pleasure. The thought that the main object of education is to satisfy the needs of children (regardless of the fact that these children will be adults one day) has been strengthened by the influence of modern child psychology, which has investigated the experiences of the child. Besides the need of pleasure one often accentuates the need of security, but as far as the fantastic tale is concerned, one has mostly thought about the need of pleasure. Such above-mentioned books as Sleigh's *Carbonel* and Norton's *Bed-knob and broomstick* seem only to be intended as entertainment.

In the history of education two movements, both still very influential, have, however, more considered the fact that the child is going to be an adult and wished to bring about certain qualities in men and women. The educationalists of the Age of Reason (the Enlightenment) wanted to impart knowledge and character. In the beginning of the 19th century the romantic educationalists introduced other ideals. The educator's aim was not to give knowledge or moral instruction but, through stimulating feeling and imagination, to liberate the "nightly" powers in the child. Both movements used children's literature as an instrument.

The romantic programme is presented in Hoffmann's *Das fremde Kind*, which is something of a pamphlet in education. The cousins, educated in the way of the Enlightenment, are scoffed at, and the tutor himself is a demon. The child's ideal life is the life of imagination together with the strange child. The romantic ideals are met with in modern fantastic tales, too. A likeness between *Das fremde Kind* and Masefield's *The midnight folk*, were the leader of the witches is masked as a governess, has already been pointed out. That may imply a kinship with the romantic ideals. The boy Eustace in C. S. Lewis' *The voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1952) puts in mind the cousins in *Das fremde Kind*. He had only read books about exports and imports, governments and municipal drains but no books about dragons. The romantic view of the child's world of free imagination as a world of higher value than the adult world is met with in Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* and in Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump*.

The tradition of the Enlightenment to impart moral, political, philosophical and religious ideas through children's literature is, however, common in the fantastic tale, too. Molesworth has the older, more open, intent to give moral lessons: the cuckoo (*The cuckoo clock*) teaches Griselda to be kind, obedient and diligent. But also Norton, in her books about the *Borrowers*, wants to teach

the proper way of living. In Nesbit's *The story of the amulet* there are glimpses of political nature: when, for instance, the Babylonian queen, transferred to our times, sees how the Londoners live, she asks why the owners of the slaves do not see to it that they get better clothes and more food. C. S. Lewis tells in *The silver chair* (1953) about a head-master, who, when he proves a complete failure in different educational professions, is helped into Parliament. The time displacements give rise to philosophical discussions about the concept of time. Thus, Pearce's *Tom's midnight garden* (1958) in the first place seems to be such a discussion. Lewis treats the possibility of other worlds. Some books deal with the struggle between the mythological powers of good and evil.

The hypothesis of the suitableness of the fantastic tale from the viewpoint of child psychology

Koch proposes a child-psychological hypothesis concerning the fantastic tale. In the life of the child there must be a time when it frees itself from magic thought and turns towards reality. This is said to happen at 7 years. In the following years, however, much of the magic thinking remains, and so the child needs a literature that mixes elements of magic and reality. Koch seems to regard the years from 8 to 11 as the stage in question.[5]

The hypothesis resembles the argument for the fairy-tale as suited to younger children who are thought to be in an altogether magic stage of development. These hypotheses, however, show the danger of what in research into the reading interests of the child is sometimes called the deductive method, that is, to deduce the child's interest in books from text-books on child psychology. The hypotheses in question are based on the description of the growth of the conception of reality given by the German developmental psychology and by the Geneva school. This is not the place to discuss the different schools of developmental psychology; it is sufficient to point out that the leading ideas of the two schools mentioned have been questioned by other schools. It is at least possible to regard magic thought not as belonging to a so-called primitive mental structure but as a line of thought of the same kind as scientific thought, though abandoned when the modern view of life appeared. In this case, there is no reason to suppose that magic thought and practice is something more typical of children than of adults.

The need for research from an educational point of view

The problem of child psychology, whether the mental structure of the child is of a more magic kind than the mental structure of the adult, is of interest to the educationalist in regard to the fantastic tale. If children take over the magic tradition from adults as they for instance take over the religious tradition, the diminishing importance of this tradition among the adults may result in less knowledge in the children about magic thought and practice. Against this it may be held that magic thought and practice are preserved in the traditional lore of the children. In this connection the

sociological point of view is of interest, too. Magic tradition is perhaps better maintained in certain countries. It thus seems that the witch tradition is very alive in Great Britain, where so many fantastic tales originate. Only research with child psychological methods can answer the question of to what extent children in different countries have interest in and knowledge about witches, talismans, etc.

Another problem has to be solved by child-psychological methods, too. As has been pointed out there is a tendency to impart philosophical, theological, etc. ideas through the fantastic tale. The problem is whether children can make use of these passages. Time displacements are common, sometimes they are even meant as a discussion of the concept of time. In this connection one can point out that the difficulty in childhood (and adolescence) to grasp the meaning of historical time is a problem for the teachers of history. Koch touches on the discussions of the possibility of other worlds and says that one cannot bring home the limitation of the intellect to an age in which the reader rejoices in his awakening intellectual powers.[6] In the Narnian books of C. S. Lewis many theological concepts are met with, e. g. the problem of faith and knowledge *(Prince Caspian,* 1951), creation and temptation *(The magician's nephew,* 1955), suffering, redemption and resurrection (*The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*). It is said (by Higgins) that Lewis did not expect his readers to compare Earth and Narnia, and Lewis writes that the Narnian books "are not as much allegory as supposal".[7] Yet, Aslan the Lion *(The voyage of the "Dawn Treader")* explicitly states that the children were brought to Narnia to meet Aslan and to be able afterwards to recognize him (that is Christ) in their own world. So, nevertheless, Lewis may have wanted to give the readers an account of the religious thought of adults, though in a form that is more intelligible to them. As a parallel in existing educational research one can point out the difficulty of children to comprehend Bible stories on an abstract religious level, demonstrated, for instance, by Goldman.[8]

I am not able here to answer all the questions asked. My aim is to encourage educational research work with regard to the fantastic tale. Such research would be most interesting and probably of significance for the whole problem of children and their books.

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[1] Anna Krüger, Das fantastische Buch. Jugendliteratur (Munich) 1960, 343—363. (Krüger says that she had the idea in 1952 and gave the definition of the genre in 1954, in the 2nd edition of her *Das Buch. Gefährte eurer Kinder.* This brochure of 1954 is the starting-point for Koch.)
Ruth Koch, Phantastische Erzählungen für Kinder, Untersuchungen zu ihrer Wertung und zur Charakteristik ihrer Gattung. Studien zur Jugendliteratur (Ratingen) 5, 1959, 55—84.

[2] In Hoffmann's fairy-tales "neither the reality of experience nor the 'world of fantasy' appear as 'the world'. Both are rather components of a whole, of a 'poetic reality', their boundaries merging... The reality of experience and the realm of magic are fused. Within that field of tension which encompasses both sectors they create fairy-tale words, the 'poetic reality' of the individual stories. Thence their

uniqueness which differentiates them clearly from other fairy-tale literature." Paul-Wolfgang Wührl, Die poetische Wirklichkeit in E. T. A. Hoffmanns Kunstmärchen. Diss., Munich 1963, 61—62.

[3] I made this point in my paper "Die Gattungen des Kinder- und Jugendbuches". Ein Programm für die geschichtliche Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung. Wirkendes Wort (Düsseldorf), in press.

[4] As a rule the strange children are not imaginary companions. This ought to be stressed as Krüger seems to regard books about imaginary companions as fantastic tales. Stories such as Peterson's *Liselott och garaffen* (Liselott and the "Garaffe", 1962, translated from Swedish into several languages) and Pearce's *A dog so small* (1962) belong to the story about children (often to the family story).

[5] Koch, 58—59, 56, 62.

[6] Koch, 60—62.

[7] James E. Higgins, *A letter from C.S. Lewis.* The Horn Book Magazine 42, 1966, 533—539.

[8] Ronald Goldman, *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence.* London 1964.

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